

NEWS RELEASE

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
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For Immediate Release

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INDICTMENT ALLEGES METHAMPHETAMINE CONSPIRACY

Randy G. Massey, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that on September 6, 2006, **AARON WAYNE PEPPE**, age 22, of Bluford, Illinois, and **STACY A. ERLINGER**, age 30, of Coulterville, Illinois, were charged with conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamine in a one count Indictment returned by a Federal Grand Jury sitting in Benton, Illinois.

Upon conviction, **PEPPE** and **ERLINGER** each face a penalty of 10 years to life imprisonment, a fine of up to \$4,000,000, and a term of supervised release of at least 5 years.

An indictment is a formal charge against a defendant. Under the law, a defendant is presumed to be innocent of a charge until proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt to the satisfaction of a jury.

The investigation in this case was a cooperative effort between the Joint Narcotics Unit of the Mt. Vernon Police Department and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, and the Drug Enforcement Administration, and other state and local law enforcement pursuant to their participation in the Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative. In addition, the Jefferson County States Attorney's Office has assisted throughout the investigation.

Project Safe Neighborhoods is a joint and cooperative effort of the United States Attorney's Office, the Jefferson County State's Attorney's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies directed at removing guns and drugs from our communities.

The case is being handled by Assistant United States Attorney George Norwood.